

PDF hosted at the Radboud Repository of the Radboud University Nijmegen

The following full text is an author's version which may differ from the publisher's version.

For additional information about this publication click this link.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2066/45984>

Please be advised that this information was generated on 2017-12-06 and may be subject to change.

In final form published as: Arnoud Lagendijk (2007) Book review of: Clusters in Urban and Regional Development, by Andy Cumbers and Danny MacKinnon (eds) (etc), Urban Studies, 44, 9, 1861-1863

Book review for Urban Studies

Clusters in Urban And Regional Development, Author: Andy Cumbers (Editor), Danny MacKinnon (Editor), Hardcover, June 2006, ISBN: 0415360110, price \$110.00

Regional industrial clusters have been in vogue for more than two decades now, and there is little indication that their significance is waning. On the contrary, to quote from Simmie's contribution to this volume, clusters continue to hold a "beguiling siren call" promising "increased competitiveness, higher productivity, new firm formation, growth, profitability, job growth and innovation" (p. 131). So time to take stock, and to see how these various claims can be upheld. This is what this edited volume, based on earlier Special Issue published in Urban Studies (Vol. 41, Nos 5/6) intends to do. After a summarising introduction, eleven chapters focus on key issues and topics in the clustering debate, including the role of labour mobility, firms linkages, knowledge production and circulation, industry cycles, etc. They are clustered under three headings, 'Conceptualising Clusters', 'Clusters, knowledge and innovation' and 'From dynamic to mature clusters'. Starting point for the discussion is the claim that, as emphasised by the Editors in the Introduction, 'cluster' remains a 'fuzzy', 'chaotic', and 'incoherent' concept (viii). A key ambition of the volume is to bring some clarity to the debate. So, what is the achievement eleven chapters and 225 pages down the line?

A problem with answering this question is that the volume does not really produce a conclusion itself. The introduction primarily provides a summary and a brief list of core directions for future research. In particular, the Editors point out the significance of *formal* channels of labour mobility, and the role of external connections in the form of embedding in international networks. Yet, they could have gone a step further and consider to what extent the results hint at a more precise and more coherent clustering approach. What is missing in that context is a more thorough review of the evolution and proliferation of the 'cluster' concept in the light of various perspectives that have, over time, dominated our thinking about processes of spatial concentration and economic specialisation. Since both a more profound conclusion and a deeper theoretical review are missing, this volume does not really go beyond a normal Special Issue. In its present form, it basically provides a set of valuable contributions, that because of the lack of integration, remain somewhat cut off from each other. Let me therefore seize the opportunity to discuss the various chapters in the light of a broad-brush characterisation of clustering perspectives, based on a division into Marshallian, neo-Marshallian and post-Marshallian perspectives.

Marshallian perspectives on clustering attribute the significance of localisation primarily to the role of (1) proliferating interfirm linkages and business specialisation, (2) labour specialisation and mobility, and (3) knowledge spillover. Quite a general consensus emerges across various chapters on the low, and even decreasing significance of the first factor, that of interfirm linkages. *Leibovitz* discussion on biotech clusters in Scotland even speaks of a misguided emphasis on local networks, that can paradoxically induce more fragmentation in an already relatively small industry. *Leibovitz*, as well as *Power's* and *Lundmark's* assessment of 'knowledge pools' in Stockholm, and the analysis of entrepreneurial activities in Ottawa by

Harrison, Cooper, and Mason highlight the role of local labour mobility and local as well as external career paths in shaping clustering dynamics. Isaksen, in addition, provides a bridge between labour and knowledge in his focus on professional consultants that foster a 'knowledge transfer structure' in Oslo. Building on similar arguments and observations, *Wolfe and Gertler* discuss a wide array of factors of cluster dynamics, including the broader institutional and governance setting. They pay particular attention to how, in particular, learning and governance processes are multi-scalar.

Neo-Marshallian perspectives consider the role of clusters as part of global flows and networks of production and knowledge circulation, often set in a multi-scalar and relational perspective. In his study of Life Science business, *Cooke* provides a stimulating account of how, through the rise of new forms of regional governance geared towards explicit or implicit science policies, regionalised knowledge chains as part of a system of globally networked regional clusters. A highly insightful paper is that by *Phelps*. In his view, a relational nature of external (and internal) economies may help us to understand the evolution of a wider variety of spatial clustering, including the spatially extended agglomerative fields. Such fields, which have become a prevalent form of spatial-economic organisation, cannot be regarded as just upscaled cluster. They require a different conceptualisation, but one which still invoke the Marshallian notions of external economies and diversity.

There are also approaches that depart significantly from a Marshallian way of reasoning. Porter's grounding of clustering within a systemic and institutionally oriented perspective on innovation and productivity stands out as 'post-Marshallian' in this respect. While all but one of the contributions are referring to Porter, *Simmie's* account on innovation and clustering provides the most detailed discussion. *Simmie* dismisses Porter's claim that the significance of urbanisation economies is shrinking, as well as his emphasis on an allegedly vital role of local buyers in enhancing innovation (although the role of local demand is actually confirmed in Isaksen's study on Oslo). What should receive much more attention, in *Simmie's* view, is the internationally distributed nature of innovation systems. Much in line with Porter's approach, *Tödtling and Trippel* indicate how important collective strategy-making is in changing industrial trajectories. Where the Styrian automotive sector has been able to revive through fostering 'relational assets' and innovative forms of cluster governance, the metal sector remains locked into a web of dense institutions with 'old' orientations. A different story comes from *Maskell and Lorenzen*, through their emphasis on the regulatory nature of production. They juxtapose network and cluster forms of market organisation. Networks, characterised by club code-books and 'swift' trust, arise when supplier-buyer links are relatively stable. Clusters, on the other hand, emerge when such stability and long-term reciprocity is absent and interaction is nurtured through community building and shared social institutions and codebooks. Market coordination thus has pregnant spatial manifestation and consequences, such as cluster formation. Together with a relational approach as propagated by *Phelps*, this seems to offer a promising route to follow up.

Benneworth and Henry, finally, directly pose the question of how we go about theorising clusters. Taking up Trevor Barnes' advocacy of 'hermeneutic theorising', based on a creative (rather than definitional), interpretive (rather than representational), and, as a consequence, necessarily situational and partial, vocabulary. They thus see clusters not as a singular (still largely Porterian) narrative, but as a 'portmanteau' concept that should allow for different perspectives and ways of reasoning "in an anti-foundationalist and anti-essentialist atmosphere". They draw, in particular, on Gordon and McCann's multi-perspectival approach presented earlier in *Urban Studies*, which seeks to integrate cluster notions from regional

economics ('Marshallian'), business studies ('Porterian') and sociology (embeddedness). To what extent this truly leads to a hermeneutic approach remains to be seen, however. *Leibovitz*, for instance, is less convinced of the encompassing nature of Gordon and McCann's approach, since it still tends to "neglect the historical and path dependent nature of urban economic change", and underplays the role of the public sector. A core question is to what extent 'good theorising' should be based on a kind of holistic ideal, or on advancing more focused lines of thinking as advocated by, for instance, Phelps, Maskell and Lorenzen or Cooke. It is a missed opportunity that this volume, while raising the issues, has not made more of an attempt to respond to such questions.

Dr Arnoud Lagendijk
Nijmegen School of Management
Department of Human Geography and Spatial Planning
PO Box 9108
NL-6500 HK Nijmegen
Tel. (+31/0)24- 3616204/3611925
Fax: (+31/0)24 - 3611841,
E-mail: A.Lagendijk@ru.nl / A.lagendijk@fm.ru.nl
Visiting address: Thomas van Aquinostraat 3.01.67 (6525 GD)
(NEW) Website: www.ru.nl/fm/lagendijk/